

[Bob White's Trained 'Dog-Salmon']

AUG 8 1939

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE NEW YORK

NAME OF WORKER Earl Bowman

ADDRESS 86 West 12th Street

DATE

SUBJECT "Bob White's Trained 'Dog-Salmon'"

1. Date and time of interview
2. Place of interview
3. Name and address of informant
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

Library of Congress

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C

TEXT OF INTERVIEW (UNEDITED)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Earl Bowman

ADDRESS 86 West 12th Street

DATE

SUBJECT "Bob White's Trained 'Dog-Salmon'"

It was while we were camped up on the Westfork of the Weiser River that my Uncle Steve Robertson told me about Bob White's trained 'dog-salmon'.

It was spring and the 'up-run' of the salmon...when that strange migration of the magnificent fish takes place and they fight their way hundreds of miles inland up the small streams to spawn at the place of their own birth.

During these 'runs' the settlers found great sport and incidentally acquired a splendid addition to their food supply by spearing the salmon as they flopped over the shallow riffles...

My Uncle Steve and I had hoped to get ourselves a salmon or two but on this day we had matched the riffles closely but never a salmon seen.

Library of Congress

Out of our lack of success came my Uncle Steve's story of Bob White's trained 'dog-fish'...

"It doesn't look like we're going to get ourselves a salmon this year, does it, Uncle Steve,' I observed a bit pessimistically, 'maybe there aren't any doggone salmon coming up into Idaho this season...."

"Hell yes, they's plenty of 'em coming', my Uncle Steve said, 'an' we'll also probably git one if we jest watch clost enough, but I-Gawd if we jest had a good trained 'dog-salmon' like 'Hector' was they wouldn't be nothin' to it... All we'd have to do would be jest let 'Hector' round 'em up an' drive 'em up to the bank an' that's all there'd be to it—Hell, we could pick 'em right out with our hands an' not have to do no wadin' or spearin' either for that matter!

"They ain't nothin' like a good trained 'dog-salmon' when it comes to huntin' salmon, or for that matter, I-Gawd any other kind of fish I reckon...

"'Hector' was Bob White's idea an' it come to him kind of sudden once when him an' Mam (she was Bob's wife) an' me was livin' down in Salubria Valley in th' early days of th' Far West an' practically everybody that was out here was Pioneers an' had to take advantage of everything they could or probably perish for its a hell-of-a-job I'm tellin' you to be a Pioneer in th' Far West in th' early days an' have to depend on jest yourselves for what you git to eat and so forth.

3

"Natcherally us Pioneers would git kind of tired of jest havin' venison an' bear steaks an' grouse an' pheasants an' wild geese an' ducks an' fresh trout and so forth fer a reg'lar diet an' sort of crave somethin' different for a change oncet in a while, so when th' spring run of salmon come along we'd spear up a lot of 'em an' smoke 'em into dried salmon or salt 'em down so we'd have somethin' different jest in a emergency...

Library of Congress

"Well, I-Gawd, it was a hell of a lot of trouble watchin' th' riffles and wadin' out over th' slippery rocks jest to spear a danged twenty-five or thirty pound salmon an' then have to pack him a-shore an' pile him up with th' rest of 'em an' then go back an' get another one till we had as many as we figgered we'd need for that season.

"Bob, he got awful tired of it an' he used to cuss a lot ever' time th' salmon ketchin' season come around ag'in—'Hell,' he'd say, 'I reckon we got to git our spears out Steve an' go spear up a batch of salmon so Mam can smoke 'em or salt 'em down for future use an' we can have a change in our diet if we git to cravin' it like we always do,'" he'd say.

"I-Gawd, I don't mind it,' I'd say, 'an' as far as that's concerned personally, spearin' salmon is kind of interestin' an' I enjoy it damned nigh as much as I enjoy huntin' deer or bear either for that matter. Besides,' I said, 'its all in a days work an' so what th' hell's th' difference whether we're wadin' over th' cussed riffles in th' Weiser River, stabbin' 4 salmon with a spear or a pitchfork, or climbin' th' doggone hills huntin' for a deer or a bear to shoot with a rifle? Damned if I can see why anybody should complain about gittin' their feet wet a little," I told Bob.

"Don't think for a minute that I give a damn about gittin' my feet wet,' Bob said, 'but what I object to is luggin' a cussed twenty-five or thirty pound salmon back to th' shore an' not have nothin' but slippery rocks to walk on while a body's doin' it! That's what I object to, I-Gawd, an' that's what I got a right to object to I figger when anybody considers how danged many times a man slips an' falls an' has th' cussed salmon smack him in th' face when it lights on him while he's chokin' on Weiser River water— If they was jest some way to drive th' damn salmon up to th' shore so we wouldn't have to wade I wouldn't mind it,' Bob said.

"Well, I-Gawd, that's th' way Bob got to thinkin' about it an' when a man gits to thinkin' about how to git out of doin' somethin' he don't like to do he generally figgers out a way to git out of it! I've noticed that.

Library of Congress

"So, damned if Bob didn't figger it out...

"I-Gawd th' next time we went spearin' for salmon instead of stabbin' a chinook or steelhead as they went floppin' by him Bob kept watchin' an' finally he throwed his spear down an' grabbed a damned big 'dog-salmon' right behind th' gills, an' started luggin' him to shore...

5

"Yeah, that's what the cussed idjit done; he jest lugged that darned 'dog-salmon', it snarlin' an' snappin' an' squirmin' an' bitin' at him at every step, plumb out of the River to the mouth of the little creek that run past our cabin and emptied into th' river clost to where we was fishin'.

"Well, I-Gawd, he didn't stop till he took that doggone 'dog fish' and got him to a old beaver pond that th' beavers had built sometime an' that was jest a little way from the house.

"Fact is we'd built our cabin where we did on account of that beaver pond. When we'd first arrived there an' Mam seen it she wanted Bob an' me to build our house clost to the pond 'cause she had a idea that maybe she'd want to raise some ducks sometime an' th' beaver pond would be a good place for 'em to swim in if she did raise any.

"When Bob got his cussed 'dog-salmon' up to th' beaver pond he got a long lariat rope an' tied it around the darned fish's neck an' tied th' other end to a cottonwood tree on th' bank then he throwed th' doggone 'dog-salmon' into th' beaver pond.

"Bob's idea was that if he had him staked out that way he could drag him in whenever he wanted to an' gentle him by degrees.

"Mam, she was kind of dubious about Bob puttin' that doggone wild, twenty-five or thirty pound 'dog-salmon' in th' little beaver pond 'cause she'd already got some ducks which she was tryin' to raise some more from and get a good start of 'em 6 an' natcherally that

Library of Congress

cussed dog-fish was almost sure to ketch some of 'em or at least to chase 'em all over the darned pond.

"So when Mam seen Bob puttin' his dog-salmon in th' beaver pond she said: "Bob White,' an' you too Steve Robertson,' Mam said, "have you gone plumb crazy, bringin' that cussed live dog-salmon home an' turnin' him loose in my duck-pond? Ain't you got sense enough to know that he's damned nigh sure to chase my ducks till they won't have no chance to set or lay eggs or anything else? I got trouble enough watching them ducks and scarin' th' coyotes an' hawks an' things like that away so they won't ketch 'em without havin' to worry my doggone head off about havin' a cussed dog-salmon to worry about too. I can't see what th' heck you want with such a critter anyhow. Who ever heard of anybody wantin' a live dog-salmon barkin' an' yelpin' around th' place an' nippin' anybody ever' time they dip a bucket of water up out of the pond."

"Don't blame th' cussed thing on me,' I told Mam, 'It was Bob's idea in th' first place, an, I ain't any fonder of a damned dog-salmon than anybody else be, an' as far as that's concerned I can't see what th' heck anybody wants with one any more'n you can Mam, so don't blame th' damned thing on me!'

"Never you mind, Mam, nor you either Steve Robertson,' Bob said, "when I git 'HectoR'—which is what my new dog-salmon's name is goin' to be— when I git 'Hector' trained an' you see him herdin' them steel-head an' chinook an' sock-eye salmon up to th' river bank so we can ketch 'em without even gittin' our 7 feet wet, you'll both bless th' day I got this dog-salmon. You sure as hell will, yes sir, I-Gawd;" Bob said enthusiastic and jubilant.

"Well, jest don't train him on none of my ducks,' Mam said, disgusted, 'cause if I ever ketch him chasin' my ducks I'll take a stick of wood an' knock his doggone teeth out, jest remember that!' Also, I don't think anybody's in their right mind that talks about trainin' a cussed dog-salmon—like anybody'd train a sheep dog or a possum-hound for instance!"

Library of Congress

"If a sheep-dog herds sheep,' Bob said, 'I-Gawd a dog-salmon ought to have sense enough to herd salmon, an' as far as anybody bein' in their right mind," Bob said, 'jest leave th' trainin' of 'Hector' up to me an' I'll show you whether he can't be trained or not!"

"Well, I-Gawd, that was one time Bob White fooled Mam an' me both— It wasn't like his idea of cross-breedin' he skunks with she-chuck-wallahs, or vice versey an' raisin' self-skinnin' skunks. No, sir, I-Gawd, he sure made a success of trainin' 'Hector' his dog-salmon!

"Danged if it wasn't only a few days till whenever Bob would go down to th' beaver pond an' whistle, or beller, 'Here, Hector! Here Hector!' damned if that fool dog-salmon would come a splashin' and playin' like a hound pup that thinks he's goin' to git a rabbit's head, or some chicken offals, or a chunk of corn bread or somethin'! Yes, sir, I-Gawd it wasn't no time till Hector knowed his name an' knowed enough to come when Bob called him. He sure as hell was a smart dog-salmon!

8

"Course Bob always give him a frog—there was lots of little bull-frogs around the edges of th' beaver pond—an' Bob usually had some in his pockets when he'd call Hector, an' Hector sure as hell was fond of them little half-grown bull-frogs.

"In spite of what Mam said about Hector chasin' her ducks, when she wasn't around Bob trained th' cussed dog-salmon to round 'em up an' drive 'em to shore, so it wasn't long till when Bob would call Hector an' give him a frog an' yell, 'Go 'way round 'em, Heck! Bring 'em in Heck— Go git 'em, Old Boy!' I-Gawd Hector'd splash out after them damned ducks and 'fore they knowed it he have 'em all drove ashore!...

"But, Bob had to quit usin' Mam's ducks to train Hector on, 'cause he got to bitin' off a foot of any danged duck that didn't head straight in and I-Gawd that was awful— He'd bite off a duck's foot an' natcherally it would scare hell out of th' duck an' it would start to swim

Library of Congress

toward th' shore but on account of only havin' one foot to paddle with, I-Gawd it would jest paddle itself around and around in a circle until all it would do would be to jest spin around and around an' never git anywhere! Yeah, Bob had to quit trainin' Hector on Mam's ducks.

"But, 'fore Hector had bit off many of Mam's ducks feet he'd got th' idea about roundin' things up when Bob would tell him to, so it didn't really matter much—he'd round up anything Bob would tell him too, so Bob got to takin' him down to th' river and have him round up salmon—

9

"Yes, sir, I-Gawd that's what he'd do! Bob would jest lead Hector down th' little creek to th' Weiser and when he got out in th' deep water he'd yell, 'Bring 'em in Heck! Go git 'em Heck— Head 'em in! Head 'em in!' an' I-Gawd old Hector'd round up a bunch of steel-head and sock-eye and chinook salmon an' nip hell out of their tails till he'd have 'em all drove right up to th' bank where Bob an' me'd be waitin'—

"Bob was plumb tickled an' proud of his trained dog-salmon... An' he probably had a right to be 'cause as far as I know Rector was th' only damned trained dog-salmon anybody'd ever heard of. At least he was th' only damned one I'd ever heard of or seen either for that matter!

"Well, sir, Bob was jest gittin' Hector trained to jest bring in sock-eye or steel-head, or chinook salmon an' leave th' rest go, accordin' to whichever kind Bob an' me wanted to ketch that day an' then Hector got th' hydrophoby an' 'course that settled it...

"I-Gawd it was awful an' it was plumb foolish th' way Hector got it. It was on account of a German...least that's what he said he was....comin' into th' Crane Creek country an' startin' to raise wheat.

Library of Congress

"In them days they wasn't no sech a thing as mad-dogs or mad coyotes or hydrophoby in Idaho or any of th' rest of th' northwest part of th' Far West. It jest hadn't developed or something.

10

"But there was a hell of a lot of them cussed little critters called 'go-downs'— May be you never seen any of 'em and don't know jest what they was like? Well, they was a sort of ground squirrel, kind of like a prairie dog or a 'picket-pin' but not exactly like either one of them... Th' reason we called 'em 'go-downs' was 'cause they was never around but three months out of the year—from April till th' first, or about th' first of July— Then they'd 'go-down' ag'in an' never be seen till th' next year in April. What th' hell they went 'down' (in their holes) for in July an' staid down for th' next nine months damned if I knowed nor I don't reckon nobody else did either.

"But that's th' way it was— Th' trouble was that for th' three months they was out they could raise more hell with a wheat crop than anything else could in a whole year. Yeah, th' country was full of 'em an' it was danged nigh impossible to raise any kind of grain crop except corn an' then anybody had to watch it day an' night to keep them damned things from eatin' it.

"Well, that German, (Von Bauer or somethin' like that was his name) got so damned mad at them 'go-downs' eatin' his wheat that he sent back east somewhere an' got somebody to send him some hydrophoby germs an' then he caught some of them 'go-downs' an' vaccinated 'em with th' cussed hydrophoby germs an' turned 'em loose. Natcherally, his idea, was to give 'em a start of hydrophoby, an' natcherally also they'd pass it on 11 from one 'go-down' to another till all of 'em would git it and die an' then he could riase his damned wheat in peace—

"Well, I-Gawd, it worked, too damned well!

Library of Congress

"The go-downs he vaccinated with hydrophoby went mad an' bit other go-downs an' they went mad and bit others and they went mad an' bit others an' pretty soon th' whole damned country was full of mad 'go-downs' bitin' each other or any damned thing they could snap at— So, natcherally they bit th' coyotes that would catch 'em an' then th' coyotes would go mad an' bite other coyotes an' they'd pass it on an' in addition to th' damned country bein' full of mad go-downs it was also full of mad coyotes—

"Yeah, that's what that goddamn fool 'Von what-ever-his name was,' started in th' Weiser river country...

"An' that also was how Bob White happened to lose Hector, th' only cussed trained dog-salmon anybody ever heard about I reckon.

"One of them mad coyotes come up to th' beaver pond one night an' hector tackled him— They had a hell of a fight an' Hector finally killed th' damned coyote - we found him dead on th' edge of th' beaver pond th' next mornin' but fore Hector finally killed him th' cussed coyote must a-bit him. Yeah, I guess that's what he done 'cause in about ten days poor old Hector went mad as hell!

"I-Gawd it was awful to see that poor damned dog-salmon havin' fits an' frothin' at th' mouth and splashin' around in that beaver-pond in agony like anything does when its got 12 hydrophoby. But that's th' way it was... He sure as hell had it.

"Well, it danged nigh busted Bob White's heart. 'Course Mam an' me wanted to kill Hector an' put him out of his misery but Bob wouldn't hear to it— 'No, I-Gawd,' Bob said, 'Maybe HectoR'll git over it...let's give him a chance anyhow...Jest everybody keep away from him so they won't git bit by him, I-Gawd, an' let him play out his hand to th' end!' Bob said.

"So, that's th' way we done an' probably it was a good thing, 'cause th' very next night Hector gnawed th' rope Bob had him staked out in the beaver pond with, in two an' swum over th' little beaver damn down into th' creek an' on down to th' Weiser River— An' I-

Library of Congress

Gawd that's th' last we ever saw of Hector, an' as far as I know, if he didn't die he might of swum plumb out of th' damned country an' maybe is swimmin' yet!

“Yeah, I-Gawd, that's th' way it was, but if we jest had Hector, Bob White's trained dog-salmon, now he'd go out in that deep water an' round up a steel head, or a chinook or a sock-eye salmon an' drive 'em right up to th' shore an' all we'd have to do would be to ketch 'em— Yeah, I-Gawd, Hector was a hell of a smart dog-salmon; he sure as hell was....”